Trump calls for 'prophets of doom' to be rejected; US leader in climate row with Greta Thunberg

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Body

President Trump attacked "prophets of doom" on climate change yesterday as he exchanged thinly veiled insults with the teenage activist Greta Thunberg.

In a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Mr Trump urged executives and ministers to dismiss "predictions of the apocalypse". The speech was watched by Ms Thunberg, 17.

"To embrace the possibilities of tomorrow, we must reject the perennial prophets of doom and their predictions of the apocalypse," he said. "They are the heirs of yesterday's foolish fortune tellers. And I have them, and you have them, and we all have them. And they want to see us do badly, but we don't let that happen."

Ms Thunberg responded with an attack on global inaction on climate change, which she warned was "fuelling the flames by the hour". Without mentioning Mr Trump by name, she accused governments of giving up on tackling an issue that is "too uncomfortable" to address.

"You say children shouldn't worry," she said. "You say, 'Just leave this to us, we will fix this, we promise we won't let you down, don't be so pessimistic' and then, nothing. Silence. Or something worse than silence, empty words and promises which give the impression that sufficient action is being taken."

Climate change is a key issue at this year's forum. While it has long campaigned for action, it has been accused of hypocrisy because of the high numbers of private jets taken by delegates to attend the week-long event in the Swiss Alps.

Mr Trump, 73, who described himself as "a very big believer in the environment", had confirmed that his country would sign up to the forum's reforestation plan, which aims to ensure the conservation and restoration of one trillion trees within a decade.

Ms Thunberg questioned the logic behind "just paying someone else to plant trees in places like Africa while at the same time forests like the Amazon are being slaughtered at an infinitely higher rate".

"Planting trees is good, of course," she said, "but it's nowhere near enough for what is needed and it cannot replace real mitigation and rewilding nature."

The teenager was named Time Person of the Year 2019, having shot to prominence after staging a solo "school Continued on page 2, col 3 continued from page 1 Trump at Davos strike" protest in her native Sweden, which quickly inspired similar action by children across the world.

She called on companies, banks and governments to halt investments and subsidies for businesses exploring and extracting fossil fuels. "Our house is still on fire. Your inaction is fuelling the flames by the hour. And we are telling you to act as if you loved your children above all else," she said.

The speech is Ms Thunberg's latest broadside against the global elite. Last autumn she used an address to leaders at a United Nations conference in New York to demand: "How dare you?" Her interventions have not always gone down well with their targets. President Bolsonaro of Brazil branded the activist a pirralha - Portuguese for "brat" - after she criticised loggers' violence against indigenous peoples in the Amazon. She appeared to accept the term as a badge of honour, incorporating it in her Twitter biography. She did the same when Mr Trump reacted to her Time accolade by claiming that she has an "anger management" problem and urging her to "chill". Yesterday the US president argued that now was a time for optimism.

"These alarmists always demand the same thing: absolute power to dominate, transform and control every aspect of our lives," he said. "We will never let radical socialists destroy our economy, wreck our country or eradicate our liberty."

He has been accused of exacerbating climate change by moving formally to withdraw the US - the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases - from the Paris accord, which commits almost 200 states to curbing global warming. The US says the agreement hits jobs and economic growth.

Davos latest, pages 12-13 Roger Boyes, page 24

Graphic

XINHUA/ALAMYPresident Trump told the World Economic Forum yesterday that he was "a very big believer in the environment". Later, Greta Thunberg, left, warned leaders in Davos that the "house is still on fire" and global inaction was fuelling the flames

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